Loose Leaves

poems by
Lampley Miguet

poems

The Breaks
Ice Cream Soup
Bishop of Martyropolis
The Cow & The Plow
Clock Reading
My White Whale
Brushing Our Teeth
There Was A House There
Elegy for The Unwanted Woman
The Beautiful and Lonely Place
Giving The Cat A Bath
Things I Thought About This Week
Meeting My Match
Remnants
Brain Training
Shorthand
Country Barbie
Oyez
A Pilates Studio in Kentucky
The Flea's Midgut
Aches and Pains
Kitten Food
To My Eighth Great-Grandparents, Who Were Bakongo
Wordle
Woman Come Down From The Clouds
PR
Twenty-Seven
Shopping List
Sweet Potato
I'm Writing A Taylor Swift Song

Hemochromatosis

Daytona Beach

Mediterranean Avenue

Daylily

In Morocco, With Her Legs Folded Beneath Her

Jane Doe, Identified

A Scholar

If I Wake Up In The Morning With Claws

Whetstone

Cat Fud

Hard-Ankled Woman Visits The Bottom of The Ocean

The Trellis

Folk Tales

Bach Flower Remedies

Rodeo of The Sweethearts

St. Vitus's Dance Meets St. Anthony's Fire

The Breaks

Aching all over —
me, the sensible woman
who avoids looking at the medicine cabinet —
I decided never to touch a pill bottle
or a bottle of Beam
after watching you wreck
your ship time and time again.

I hate to see what those rocks
have done to you —
maybe someday you'll find out
how to safely reach the shore.

Ice Cream Soup

I love to sleep —
in my dreams, he is
still alive, still
beside me,
still breathing those
miraculous breaths,
so steady and measured.
Just as he was.

In time, we will all
melt away —
some of us slowly,
others hurtling toward
the unknown.

I find him in a dream, but
before I can beg him
to come back down,
I lose him all over again.

Later in the day, when I'm
eating a bowl of ice cream,
a fly lands on my spoon.
I know that this is his way of saying,
Don't worry about me —
savor what you have
while it's still in front of you.

Bishop of Martyropolis

I didn't even know it was a real place —
somewhere that's since been renamed.

It feels familiar, based on
nothing but the feeling of
the name given to it
by the old clerics and magistrates.

Their pain wasn't so different from ours,
you know. They had feelings and memories,
and agonies —
to say nothing of the ecstasies.

Someday, I will visit this place,
and it will leave an impression on me —
a new impression, I hope, so different
from my preconceived notions and
anxieties.

The Cow & The Plow

Crying in front of *Plowing in the Nivernais* —
I understand how it feels to be overworked and
to feel overwhelmed by the heat,
to slip through the manure,
to feel an ache in the ribs,
to marvel at the fact that
after the sowing comes the reaping.

But the harvest is many days away,
many rows away,
beyond layers of time and mud.

Clock Reading

We are too often called on
to rush through the stages of grief,
because time is not on our side.

But time is one of the only things I can
depend on —
like clockwork, they say —
and the passing of each day
brings us a bit of regularity,
a bit of a routine.

I breathe loudly at night,
checking for your ghost.
If you want to climb into my bed,
curl up beside me,
and we'll stay together again,
at least until the morning arrives
and the mourning is over.

My White Whale

After all the chasing and chasing,
I'm tired of the pursuit.
No longer wanting to follow you,
no longer wanting to be wanted.

You can slip back into the ocean,
explore the murky depths —
and I'll remain ashore,
because I don't have sea legs,
and I don't want to sing any more
siren songs.

Brushing Our Teeth

Every night, I'm too tired
to get off the couch, to stagger down
the carpeted hall, to make the long journey
toward the sink.

I wash a day's worth of crumbs and residue
down the drain — *feeling drained* —
and I watch the water swirl quickly,
then slowly, then disappear entirely.

It's still there — but even the water
needs to go away for awhile,
to rest under the stillness and steadiness
of the cool Earth,
like a soft tongue in a warm mouth.

There Was A House There

A big muddy slip,
and the pile of muddy blankets —
everything we own is
covered in other peoples' lives.

The perfect picture of humanity —
this is proof that there are so many of us,
so many trinkets,
so many belongings,
so many things and people
blown about in the wind.

I've heard people talk about
taking our problems and putting them in a pile —
today, all of our lives are in this
sixty-foot high stack of debris.

It will never be a house again —
no homecoming here.
It will never be what it once was,
and we'll never be certain
that the doors and the shingles and
the windowpanes and the bricks
won’t give way once more.

Someday, these houses
will feel less like sandcastles
and more like homes.

Elegy for The Unwanted Woman

I'm glad she's dead —
that's what the people in town are saying,
now that you're off the streets,
and out from under their boyfriends
and husbands and sons.

Now the only thing you're under
is that mound of dirt,
patchy grass, slippery mud that gets
sticky and wet with the spring rain.

Rain, not tears for you.
Nobody comes here to cry —
though several have brought their dogs
to come take a dump on your bones.

I come here today to carry out a promise —
a selfish promise, but a promise just the same.
I told you that, when you died, I would buy
every red rose at the Walmart and
come throw them on your grave.

I said I would sing and dance,
and I'm going to do it,
once I finish having a word with you —

Finally, a conversation you can't interrupt!

Here, take your roses.
But I just have to tell you,
while I was handing my money
to that cashier who looked old,
and tired, saggy-jowled and

rodehardandputawaywet —

I realized that she could have been you,
or you could have been her,
if you'd ever had the chance to become
something other than an unwanted woman.

Her life seems miserable?
Not compared to yours.
Not compared to the woman with
a stable of perverted sugar daddies,
men who were too busy eyeing your own daughter,
a greedy heart, a bitter soul,
no custody, no visitation,
no friends, no family.

The cashier has wrinkles. You had nothing.

I've cast out the beam in my own eye,
just so I could get a better look at the mote in yours.

And I finally see that you acted up
because you were never wanted.
Boys didn't want you.
Men didn't *really* want you.
Women didn't want you —
not that you wanted any of them.

But your own parents didn't want you around.
Your children cried when they saw you.
Your son turned away when he saw you
coming up the aisle at Food Giant,
because his friends would've laughed
if they knew *you* were the one
who brought him into this world

only to abandon him.

But the whole time, you were also left
to rot, to be made to feel unwanted.
You had nowhere to go,
and no one to embrace you
unconditionally.

No one brushed your soft hair,
warmed your bathwater,
saved a slice of cornbread for you,
gave selflessly just to see you smile.

You were never wanted —
and you were made to feel it.

Now, why am I crying?
I don't feel sorry for you —
in *that*, I am unswerving —
but I feel sorry for every person
who's interchangeable with you.

There will come a day when I can dance,
but I have to go easy on myself.
My knees are shaking.
I'll save the dance for another day —
I'll have to break that promise for now.

The Beautiful and Lonely Place

Pulling over on the side of the road,
aiming at the deer,
clicking and clicking until I get
the best photos of the speckled sunlight
dancing down the fawn's spotted coat.

A minute and a half into taking these pictures,
while stealing this fleeting moment of loveliness,
I notice the buzzing flies five feet to my left.
The dead possum — roadkill —
makes me sick to my stomach.

I'm mad at myself for focusing on the distant beauty,
for overlooking the nearby sorrow.

Giving The Cat A Bath

This time of year, the light hitting the leaves looks different.

It's something about the sunshine —
it's taking longer for the light to reach the Earth.

I remember the summertime,
giving the cat a bath and
watching his little mouth round off in a capital *O*,
watching him cry silently —
even as I was gentle,
even as I poured the lukewarm water
slowly down onto him,
even as I kept the soap
from seeping into his eyes.

He looked up at me,
begging for me to end the bath —
and so I relented.

I keep asking for this season
to rush straight into the next one,
to go on and pass into something more brilliant,
something that doesn't require me
to lather myself in layers of repression.

Things I Thought About This Week

The little gray kitten has FIV
and cotton-candy-soft fur.

The bun tastes better after
the pickle juice has soaked into it
for an hour or two.

The clouds are working remotely
this morning — they've decided that
becoming fog is easier,
safer, and more environmentally friendly.

I already knew you were good at parking when
I watched you pull in —
you made your tires kiss the curb.
So close, so precise.

But I found out that you were a good driver
when I watched you speed off —
far off, away from me.

Meeting My Match

We're wearing the same sweater,
wearing the same pair of slippers,
and shopping at the same store.

I notice that we have similar taste —
you were standing in front of the NyQuil
when I was looking for a bottle of Benadryl.
You were looking at a shelf full of wine
while I selected my favorite whiskey.

When we both arrive at the self-checkout counter,
I try not to make eye contact with you.
We both deserve to keep some secrets —
so please don't mention what you saw in my cart.

Remnants

I check the weather report and
I see it's raining diamonds on Neptune.

Somewhere else, I know it's raining gold.
The minerals that fall from the sky
are nothing compared to the waters of Earth,
nothing compared to the tears we've cried for each other.

Someday, when our tears are spent,
we'll find a way to make the sky cry jewels for us —
to pour something more precious onto you and me.

Brain Training

My teeth hurt from telling people how much I love you —
just a healing kiss is all I'm asking in return.

I know you so fully —
and you know me.
You know the little things that
make me itch and make me smile.

And that’s enough,
because it is everything to me.

Shorthand

Among all the lines and scribbles,
there's a reference to you.

All day, I'm making secret notes
which I'll slip to you later tonight.
And even if you can't read the symbols,
please read between the lines.

Country Barbie

They repossessed your ATV and
made you get rid of your old man —
but he was just holding you back anyway.

Malibu and Mexico City —
I'm always thinking about places girls like us have rarely been.

My legs feel heavy in these old boots,
but it's time to take a walk.
It's time for me to get going.
And I'll bring you — your memory — with me.

The ticket is free —
but the baggage is already costing me.

Oyez

Write a poem if
you don't want people
to judge your children.

Give your children to the world
if you don't want your voice and
your words to be mocked.

Your writing and your kids,
they have to stand on their own two feet —
especially once you've grown them up and
let them go out into something bigger
than themselves.

You can't keep people from laughing —
and there will be laughter —
but there will be some people who understand
and agree and love the things
you've poured out from yourself.

Do not worry —
let your children have a life of their own.
They are capable of building their own future,
making their own enemies,
and finding their own friends.

A Pilates Studio in Kentucky

This once was a pole barn —
an empty place where cats and lizards slept,
where snakes crawled,
where stray dogs squatted.
I don't recognize this new place
because it isn't for me.

I'm just a possum, or a salamander,
and I'll have to find a refuge elsewhere.
I'll make my own place
at the bottom of an empty mine
or inside a glowing tabernacle —
with no mirrors, but with bright lights
and cold, familiar amenities.

The Flea’s Midgut

I shrink down to microscopic dimensions
to make myself better fit into your world.
A stolen glance, a fleeting thought —
even though we mean so little to each other,
I can't stop wanting to be more involved.

I'm living in the flea's midgut,
and it's giving me a stomachache.
Next time, I'll build a better prison for myself.

Aches and Pains

Then came the pain of realizing
that I was as normal as everyone else —
but I'm not. I'm not.
I'm sure I'm more human,
I'm sure that I hurt more deeply and
bleed more than the
average person.

Kitten Food

I can still taste the salty shreds —
I've been eating kitten food on the Internet to make myself famous.

I find a following by
posting videos where I eat
and review cat food.
Some brands are just better —
full of flavor, juicier,
easier to chew.
Sometimes I savor the tough meat,
because I need a challenge.

Perverts send me money,
teenagers tell me I'm funny,
and they've asked me to do
red carpet interviews at
the next Met Gala.

“She got ahead by selling out.”
It might be true — it might be.
But I only sold out because
I knew *you* would buy in.

To My Eighth Great-Grandparents, Who Were Bakongo

I don't know your names,
and I have no right to give you
misnomers, as other people did.

I'm also afraid to ask you
to talk to me through a ~~liminal~~ luminal space.
Maybe I will misunderstand.

I want to watch you step out of the shadows —
I want to know more.

I think of the history that wasn't preserved,
of everything that was lost,
of every secret joy that was left behind,
of every pot that was left boiling,
of every child that cried for a mother or father
who wasn't coming home —

and I feel like I have a thorn in my side
that I don't know how to pull out safely.

I cannot fathom the burdens of other people,
I cannot claim their pain as my own.
Even attempting to understand
has put my brain and my stomach in knots —
the pain must run deep.

It isn't my right to know all of your secrets —
oh, but I wish I knew more.
All of the knowledge that's been withheld
is just another burden we share.

This pain that we share is a pain that
connects us —
separated by centuries and by an ocean,
we are still in communion with each other.

Or I would like to be —

Maybe it is enough for me
to know that you existed.
Just to be able to remember you,
just to be able to know what we've lost.

Wordle

LIMBO
DISCO
IDLED
GEESE
ANGEL

It doesn't mean anything
when I can't find the right words.

It just means that I'll have to quit
until tomorrow, when I can start
with a clean slate.
And I can wait, because
I'll have five more chances then.

Woman Come Down From The Clouds

I saw your wet hair and thought
you were an angel.

You've come walking across the field and
though I don't remember you,
I feel like I know you so well.

You're so familiar,
you make me want to be a better person.
I want to be someone like you —
someone worthy of getting to know.

PR

Everything I say feels scripted —
but it isn't, *it isn't* —
but it seems like I'm
staging a show
for an audience of none.

I try to say the best thing,
I try to say the right thing,
but it feels too studied,
too practiced,
too much unlike myself.

I don't even know my own voice —
but I don't recognize this one.

Twenty-Seven

One tree standing for every three hundred gone —
that's what we saw after
the tornado and the ice storm and
the last cold snap of the most brutal
season we'd ever faced.

As I drive down the highway,
I look over and make brief eye contact with
my cousin's grave marker
in the too-full cemetery.

There she is,
because the winter
was too much for her,
because the world
wasn't ready for her —
but the Earth welcomed her.

Shopping List

Freshwater lotion,
a small bag of cucumbers,
lavender bouquet.

Sweet Potato

You can't hide from
that thing you're running toward —
you can't hide from it anymore than
you can hide from that thing
you keep running away from.

It sinks in and buries its roots.

I'm out in the garden
planting sweet potatoes
and morning glories,
and I'm thinking about
the sorghum my grandfather
once grew.
We're always trying to grow something
a little bit sweeter than ourselves.

Clumps of freshly-tilled soil
cling to my ankles.
Even the little things will leave their traces.

I’m Writing A Taylor Swift Song

Your red wine spilled on my merino scarf —
in reality, cold brew is dribbling down my chin
and I can’t afford nice wool
and I can't find the words
to tell the whole story of
who we are
and who we were.

I know I’m supposed to write
a perfect chorus,
words that make sense and
appeal to every listener.
But I can’t make beautiful music
about me, you, or *meandyou*.

Hemochromatosis

This is the Iron Age —
an era where I no longer eat meat
and only drink Irn Bru.

The room is cluttered with empty containers,
because I've been consuming more —
more than my fair share —
and I've not focused on creating,
on building, on growing.

Somebody else has already
written the novel I want to write
about a woman with small problems
and meager solutions.

So I must focus on something else —
some other means of making art
for art's sake.

Daytona Beach

Taking the dog for
a walk because I don't have
anywhere to go.

I bury my head
in her soft, silky fur and
I dry my hot tears.

Mediterranean Avenue

I'm looking at a house on Old Kent Road.
It's not much different from my old digs
on Baltic Avenue, and it's much better than
that dilapidated hotel on Mediterranean.

Listen — do you want to be the iron
or do you want to be the boot?
Please let me be the warship,
because I swear I'm made of
stronger stuff.

Daylily

I never had a wedding and
I went to prom with a group of
single girls.

I didn't need any ceremony
focused on two people —
I needed the love of the world.

I had no need for admiration or fame —
I needed empathy and respect and
soft, gentle hands
in the middle of the cold night,
in the high heat of the day.
I needed to receive that kind of love —
and I was ready to give in return.

Let's take care of each other —
just because we can.

In Morocco, With Her Legs Folded Beneath Her

I am sleeping soundly, almost —
save for the headache that jerks my eyes open,
dancing down the bridge of my nose and
tangling itself up in my hair.

At my aching elbow,
I feel the soft pull of one of my ancestors.
She gently pushes back
the fabric and smooths it down.

This must have been a fleeting moment
brought about by a dream.
It couldn't have been real.

But her graying hair, her dark kaftan,
her wrinkled hand —
I know she was there.
Thank you, m'mi.

We're separated by hundreds of years,
but thank you for coming to visit me
in my delirium.

I start asking myself questions so that I can fall
back asleep without disturbing anyone else:
Did Emily Dickinson write the same poem twice?
Why do snowflakes look like that?
Will that jar of jam freeze if I leave it in my car?

I quit asking questions and I fall asleep
in the warm embrace of
history and memory.

Jane Doe, Identified

Plans change so often —
things start to get better,
people fall out of friendships,
new anxieties and
new interests arise.

I guess I'd rather live
without the pain of not knowing.

Food spoils in the fridge,
moths move into the linen closet.
But in the mornings,
I lie here and I think about you.

An annoying bird sings
outside our window.
I would've given up before, maybe,
but I have my own songs to sing.
And our dreams —
I want to make our shared dreams
into something real and
alive.

A Scholar

I dreamed I went back to school
to work on all the homework
I got away with leaving unfinished.

I'm in the middle of making a list
of all the equations I have to solve
before our next class —
and then I wake up.

Why was it always math class?

Perhaps it's because
I rarely have solutions and
problems still make me nervous.

If I Wake Up In The Morning With Claws

There are millions of poems about the moon —
being so lovely, being omnipresent,
being strong enough to turn the tides,
being strong enough to turn women into wolves.

The moon is lovely
because of its beauty —
the power it stores and
the power it shares.

Whetstone

I walk around with
a knife in my mouth.
I've got a small sword
tucked in my bra.
I carry and wield the weapons
I think I might need.

You're crossing your Rubicon,
while I'm crossing the Alps
on my elephant.
She's getting older,
but her tusks are still sharp.

Cat Fud

My heart's been hungrier than that stray cat
that lingers on your back doorstep.

I've made my bed
in a little pile of leaves and gravel,
and I must get some rest now —
even though my stomach aches
and all my senses are tingling.

I'll be putting my head down soon,
anyway, so the least I can do is
say a little prayer for you —
about you —
while my head is bowed and
my eyes are closed.

Hard-Ankled Woman Visits The Bottom of The Ocean

For all the times that she'd been
rode gently and put away with
all the burrs combed out of her coat,
this marked the end of it all.
Rode roughshod and put away
somewhere beneath the Marianas Trench.

Among all of the people reaping and sowing,
the woman in the cloak stands with her back
to the rest of us.
She can't hide the ache in her back
anymore than I can hide the ache in my heart.
We've both been done wrong.

I always want to sound calm and kind,
but I feel the shrillness of my voice
whistling through the stillness —
when I call to her,
I don't expect an answer.

She turns to look at me,
and that is enough —
enough to see that
other women like me, like *us*,
have weathered storms and squalls.

The Trellis

If we get the chance to come back
in our next lives, in *other* lives,
I will be the trellis and you will be the vine.
Climb me, wrap your hands around me,
curl yourself up around my rougher edges.

It won't matter if we don't recognize each other —
you, the lovely chain of flowers, and me,
the unbending structure —
because we never really got the chance
to know each other quite so well
as the plant knows the frame that cradles it.

Folk Tales

Ever since I told you
about the time I climbed
a mountain in Florida,
you've known that I love
to tell a good story.

It's so hard to stop myself,
to keep the yarn from being spun.
But I've got a lot of wool
and I always keep my spinning wheel ready,
in case you happen to stop by,
in case you want to see me,
in case you're ready to listen.

Bach Flower Remedies

Thank you to the flowers
for giving me something healing —
and thank you to the winter wheat
for giving me something
to run my hands through
besides his hair.

Rodeo of The Sweethearts

Every spring, I picked bright daffodils
in the sparse shade of a Bradford pear tree.
I made friends with the yellow flowers
and wrangled golden weeds.
I wove them together —
endless strings of sunglow bunched up tightly,
like cows lined up at the feedlot.
It wasn't a bouquet —
it was a herd.

I lived on the edge of town —
or on the edge of the countryside —
and I could see the sun rising over the highway from my bedroom window.
I was always looking for something
more interesting than pastures and meadows,
after living in a town where running yellow lights
is one of our favorite pastimes.

There was an island in the middle of the river,
which I could see from my grandmother's house.
She lived up the highway from us —
it was quite a distance, but
I was always willing to chase yellow lines,
to get up and go, to be somewhere different.

Out on the island, a lovely patch of goldenrod
whispered to me.
You can come visit us, but let us stay here.
It isn't so bad on the island,

even when the old river rises —
because we know this place,
because we know how to share this land,
because we share these roots,
because we've nestled here alongside each other.

St. Vitus's Dance Meets St. Anthony's Fire

The journalism world was not for me –
I could never write a good obituary.
How can I pull together the
full picture of someone's life?
The proper words are always out of reach,
and there's no good way to
account for all the names of all the people
who danced in and out of their orbit.
There are so many people who leave impressions on us, and so many names we'll never bother to learn.

But I knew I really loved him
when I'd memorized his mother's obituary,
when I knew the names of his late aunts and uncles, and when I could
draw his family tree in my mind,
even knowing that I would never be
part of his story.